

**Volume I
Issue 6
September 2006**



QUOTABLE

**“Books are not men,
and yet they stay alive.”**

**— Stephen Vincent
Benét**

The back page

**Literacy is a vital tool in
maintaining physical
health**

**There's an International
Literacy Day, too — and
it has a past**

**Vista literacy center
opening late 2006**

LEARN Alive!



International Literacy Month is more than a wink and a nod

**By MARTIN JONES WESTLIN
Editor/publisher, LEARN Alive!**

The conventional wisdom is that man wasn't born to read. Reading, after all, is a pretty sophisticated language art — and like the opposable thumb and the fruitcake, it's one of the very few items that distinguish us from fish and cats and dogs (except Lassie, who probably, like, knows Euclidean geometry).

But just because reading is an acquired skill doesn't make it any less vital to the culture. From LEARN's point of view, that's what September is all about. Indeed, International Literacy Month is a bow to global promotion of reading and writing skills and their necessity on every level of mainstream life.

In this month's letter, LEARN presents some short pieces to that effect. They cover literacy's part in personal health, music's role in reading competency and a piece of administrative lore that shares an odd connection with a TV staple.

About 422,000 San Diego County adults are said to struggle with reading and writing — and no matter the month, LEARN can help and is always looking for volunteer tutors. Our contact information is as near as the bottom-left corner of page 2. If you're planning a personal visit, please leave your fish and cats and dogs in the car.

Of note: Music is a highly literary pursuit

When you nailed down your ABCs all those many decades ago, you also learned the little song that goes with them, the one that accompanies the lyrics to "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." It turns out you were in good company — the tune has inspired tons of variations, not the least of which was adapted by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart when he was but 17.

The point is that your first brush with literacy featured your introduction to music. Studies are crazy with connections between the two fields — competencies in one seem to reflect fluency in the other.

(See Music on page 2)



Food for thought: Reports link literacy and health

The funny old saws about your doctor's illegible handwriting go hand in hand with discussions about the nation's health care system. Often, though, the humor gets lost inside the patient's inability to read medical instructions under the best of circumstances. According to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report, low literacy skills translate to less accessible health care and a depletion in the nation's quality of life.

The report states that "More than 90 million adults in the United States have poor literacy, which would cause them to have trouble finding pieces of information or numbers in a lengthy text... Those with poorer reading skills are believed to have greater difficulty navigating the health care system and to be at risk of experiencing poorer health outcomes." Dozens of similar assessments, the report acknowledges, cite the same or similar findings.

In a separate report, the department urges widespread implementation of a core solution — learner-based selection of information on health topics that affect them and their families.

Music

"Language is symbolic," renowned educator Cak Marshall wrote, "just as are the alphabet, phonics, numbers et cetera. Obviously, music falls into that category as well. Children need to learn to *decode* in order to read. Music is rich with opportunities to decode and interpret. We are constantly challenging children with the sound/symbol relationship. Through movement and rhythm, we can also help them learn to decode." But amid wholesale education budget cuts, both disciplines are taking a hit. Perhaps the *real* decoding effort belongs elsewhere.



International Literacy Day didn't happen overnight

On Sept. 8, 1966, James Tiberius Kirk plotted his maiden course for the final frontier. The television premiere of *Star Trek* would spawn a cluster of spin-off TV series and films — two mediums that often compromise the objectives of literacy programs everywhere.

It's ironic, then, that that date also marks the first International Literacy Day, set aside to mobilize global interest and support for literacy activities. Each year, leaders recommit to their hopes for world populations marginalized by their lack of education, including an estimated 860 million adults who can't read and write and 100 million children who lack access to schools.

The event is a product of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which laid the groundwork in 1946. That year, the organization addressed the world, seeking support for informal education. Twenty years later, the international literacy community formally proclaimed Sept. 8 its watershed date. In 2002, the United Nations adopted a resolution proclaiming 2003 to 2011 as the Literacy Decade. Education for All, an international literacy campaign, seeks to raise the world's literacy rates 50 percent by the year 2015.

LEARN Alive!

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588-3740. www.sdcl.org; click the

Adult Literacy link.

LEARN sets no trainings for September as plans for expansion continue to unfold

There's no opening date yet for LEARN's North County office, which will be located at the Vista library branch, 700 Eucalyptus Ave. It's likely, however, that construction will begin in October; the opening is anticipated sometime before the end of the year. We'll update you regularly beginning next month.

QUOTABLE

"Reading, after a certain age, diverts the mind too much from its creative pursuits. Any man who reads too much and uses his own brain too little falls into lazy habits of thinking."

— Albert Einstein